



## ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES TRIGGERED BY THE NEET YOUTH

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**Abstract** *The NEET rate is a relatively new indicator which gained during the last two decades an increasingly higher importance with respect to youths' labour market both in the approaches of international organisations and in the mass-media.*

*The high rates of the young NEET population represents one of the important challenges for each country, not only due to the risks of the "scarring effects" but also due to the negative effects of this statutes on the future outcomes of the labour market for the individual and for the community and the society in which he/she lives.*

*Evaluating the economic and social consequences of the NEET statutes plays an important role in developing the policies for youths and in adopting measures for increasing their insertion on the labour market and for encouraging them to remain enrolled in educational or vocational training systems.*

*The paper presents a brief analysis of the NEET youths' situation in Romania within the European context and highlights a series of economic and social consequences generated by the NEET statutes for some youths.*

**Key words:**

Youth NEET,  
Youth  
unemployment,  
NEETs'  
characteristics,  
economic and  
social  
consequences

**JEL Codes:**

E24, J13,  
J21, J89

### 1. Introduction

The youths with ages between 15 and 29 years are faced, next to the traditional challenges at the time of entering the adult age, with the fact that they will live in an era of full globalisation and will have to meet the responsibilities demanded by an ageing population.

Within the European Union, the number of youths under the age of 30 who are neither employed on the labour market, nor in the education or vocational training system has increased to almost 14 million individuals (or 15.3% from the young population). In this context, the challenge faced by the EU-28 member-states' governments is very high. The increase in the insertion degree of the youths on the labour market and their social integration has turned into permanent concerns in the policy of the member-states. These states have already elaborated/developed a series of measures, both for preventing youth from entering into the NEET category, and for the reinsertion in the labour market and in the society of those finding themselves already in the NEET category.

The current trends regarding labour force employment but also the social ones represent major challenges, and the directives referring to labour force employment elaborated by the European Council (Council Decision 2010/707/EU, 2012) pursue to ensure a stable policy orientation for the member-states

so as to meet this complex context in view of attaining the Europe 2020 Strategy's objectives.

Unemployment, early school-leaving, difficult family circumstances, a precarious state of health, and gender inequalities are but few of the reasons that may lead to an increase and the perpetuation of vulnerability and poverty and, implicitly, to growing numbers of youths within the NEET category.

The issues faced by youths on the labour market have significant direct consequences from an economic, social and even cultural viewpoint not only on them, but also on their families and communities (local, national and international) to which they belong. The most important effects of their inactivity are: economic risks related to present and future perspectives on medium- and long-term (career development, future pension rights, etc.); social: poverty risk, the social and self- exclusion risk, of disengagement at individual level expressed in the incapacity of playing an active role within the community to which they pertain, and for the development of the society as such.

The present paper intends, in the context of these general aspects, to analyse the main characteristics of the young NEET population, the economic and social consequences of failing to integrate in the labour market or within the educational systems of the NEET population, born by various European countries, but

also to estimate the forecast of the NEET rate among the young population with ages between 15 and 24 years in Romania by means of econometric methods.

## 2. General Characteristics of the NEET Groups

The statistics provided by various international bodies regarding the participation of youths in the labour market do not reflect precisely their situation because many of them are students and, consequently, they are not considered as included in the labour force (European Employment Observatory, 2010). As result, it can be said that the traditional indicators of participation to labour market have a limited relevance in the case of youths.

Usually, the participation to the labour force market is described based on indicators such as the employment rate and the unemployment rate. These provide information about those who already have a job, or are actively in search of a job. In the present conjecture, youths' integration into the society can no longer follow the traditional and linear model (as a succession of steps from school to work) and, consequently, this one is replaced by diversified and individualised trajectories from school to work. These make that the traditional approaches regarding the analysis of the vulnerable position of youths on the labour market to turn more inefficient, several of these transitions failing to be accounted for by the conventional indicators of the labour force market.

Thus, researchers, national and international authorities began to use alternative concepts and indicators for characterising and analysing the situation of youths in the labour market. For the individuals aged between 15 and 29 years and who, irrespective of their educational level, are not gainfully employed or pursuing educational training, and hence are more exposed to higher risks of social and labour market exclusion, the concept of NEET was developed (not in employment, education or training) (Eurofound, 2012).

As of the year 1990, when the acronym NEET emerged for the first time, the interest for this category of youths increased at the level of the EU policies and the term is mentioned explicitly in the Europe 2020 Agenda, as well as in the "Employment Package – Towards a job-rich recovery" (European Commission, 2012).

From a less known indicator and which had as purpose to draw attention to the issue of school abandon among teens by the end of the nineties, it gained in importance so that it was proposed as specific objective for the youths in the Report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly (regarding the sustainable development objectives after the year 2015, for Goal 8: "promoting sustainable

economic growth favourable to inclusion, to full-and productive employment of labour force and to decent work for all. Within this goal, the youths are identified under two subordinated goals: 8.5 "until 2030 the full-and efficient employment of labour force, decent working conditions for all men and women, including youths and individuals with disabilities, as well as similar remuneration for equal value work" and 8.6 "until 2020 the substantial diminishment of the weight of the unemployed youths and of those who are not included in any form of education or vocational training (NEET)".

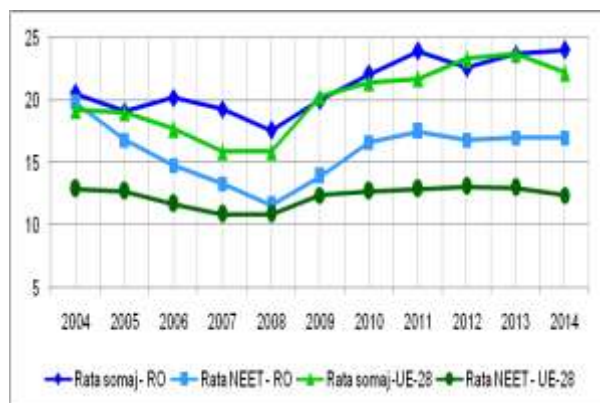
The popularity of the "NEET" concept is associated with its potential to approach a wide range of vulnerabilities among youths: it reaches to issues related to unemployment, early school leaving, but also elements related to discouraging youths in the labour market.

The international bodies, including here the EU-28 level have expressed their concern regarding these youths who seem completely economically and socially disengaged and, in this context, the decision factors of the EU use increasingly often the concept of NEET (*not in employment, education or training*). The NEET category refers to individuals aged between 15 and 29 years of age who, irrespective of their level of studies are not gainfully employed, or pursuing educational training and, thus are more exposed to higher risks of social and labour market exclusion (*Young people and NEETs in Europe*: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions).

The high rates of the young NEET population are one of the major challenges for each country not only due to the risks of the "scarring effects" but also because of the negative effects of this statutes on the future outcomes of the labour force market for an individual but also for the community and society to which he/she pertains (Schmillen & Umkehrer, 2013; Möller și Umkehrer, 2014; Gregg & Tominey, 2004).

The analysis of the unemployment rate and of the NEET rate development for youths in the age-group between 15 and 24 years of age (Figure 1) highlights that the two rates "pursue" each other rather closely, only that the NEET rate for the entire period is considered to under 14% for EU-28 and under 20% for Romania. For the two indicators, at EU-28 level, the linear correlation coefficient is 0.865, and the non-linear correlation coefficients have also high values: Spearman coefficient is 0.8 and the Kendall coefficient is 0.667. For Romania, the linear correlation coefficient is 0.623, and the non-linear ones have values of 0.721, respectively 0.611, that is values deriving directly from the concrete situation in Romania. These outcomes suggest that in the analyses using aggregated time-series or panel-type analyses, the choice between the two indicators is not of major importance.

Figure 1 Development of the unemployment rate and of the NEET rate in EU-28 and Romania, (%)



Source: Eurostat statistics (online data code: [une\_rt\_a], [yth\_empl\_160])

Against the recent increase of interest in using the NEET indicator for analysing the youths' situation on the labour market instead of the unemployment rate as adequate concept for characterising the youths' labour market issues, several voices urged caution in using this indicator (Elder, 2015). Indeed, among NEETs are included various "types" of youths whose presence with this status depends on a variety of factors: unemployment, discouragement, family issues, health problems, the intention to pursue other things, etc. It would be preferable to use both indicators with the purpose of enriching the understanding of the decision factors and not only about what happens on the labour market for youths. Practically, considering also the change of the economic model at global and European level which attracted also a change in occupational patterns, and in the job requirements, an increased refining would be necessary with respect to the NEET concept or, alternately, to identify a concept that would characterise more detailed the circumstances for the groups included now more or less justifiably within the general NEET concept. The labour market for youths will undergo the most dynamic and dramatic changes in the following years, on one hand because of the unemployment recorded for this segment, and also due to the way in which the new generations will choose to solve their personal options related to economic and social status aspirations.

#### ✚ The main characteristics of the NEET population

According to the latest Eurostat estimates, in the year 2014, the percentage of youths who are neither employed or pursuing an educational training within the EU-28 varied from 6.4% for the age-group 15-19 years, to 20.3% for youths with ages between 25 and 29 years.

This percent varies significantly from one member-state to the other for each age-group. Thus, for the age group 15-19 years, the NEET rate varies from 2% in the Netherlands, to 14.1% in Bulgaria. 13 of the member-states have a NEET rate for this age group above the EU-28 average of 6.4%. For the age-group 20-24 years, the NEET rate is higher than for the age-group 15 to 19 years, and values under 9% are registered only in Slovenia and Romania (7.8%, respectively 8.4%). Belgium, Cyprus and Great Britain are the only countries where the NEET rate exceeds the European Union average of 25.2%.

High values of the NEET rate were registered for the youths with ages between 25 and 29 years. In the Netherlands, 7% of the youths from this age-group segment are NEET and represent the lowest value for this indicator. The vast majority of the member-states have registered for the NEET rate for this age-group in the year 2014 values above the EU-28 average of 20.3 pp. (Fig.2). In Romania, 24.6% of the youths with ages between 25-29 years were included in the NEET category (Fig.2).

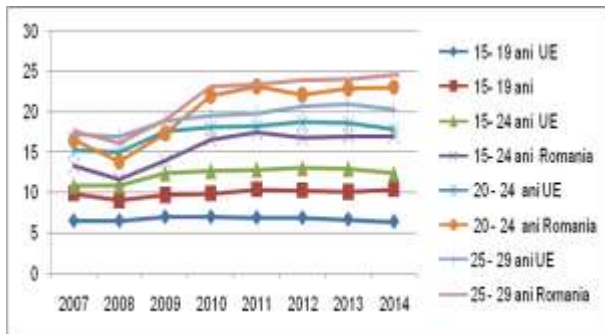
Both within a country and between countries, NEET represent a heterogeneous group. In the NEET category are included youths, irrespective of their educational level. The analysis of the educational level of the youths included in NEET reveals that those with lower education levels are overrepresented in the NEET group. The analysis of the NEET population structure for the age-group between 15 and 29 years of age, in 2014, shows that in Spain and Malta the youths with lower educational level represent approximately 63% from the total NEET population. If in 2013 the NEET rate for the youths in the age-group from 15 to 29 years of age knew slight increases in the majority of the member-states, in 2014 the situation changed, that is, most countries recorded diminishments for this indicator.

International statistics and existing analyses within the specialised literature reveal that the NEET rates differ strongly depending on gender being often higher for women than for men. The female-male gap of the NEET rate is considerable in a series of member-states, reaching 10.4 percentage points in the Czech Republic and values over 6 pp in Hungary (8.6 pp), Romania (7 pp.), Slovakia (6.8 pp), and Malta (6 pp).

The analysis of the NEET rate development, based on the data provided by Eurostat statistics show that in the period from 2000 to 2008, in Romania this rate followed the same descending trend as the EU average, and in the period 2009-2014 an increasing trend. If in the year 2008 in Romania, the NEET rate was of 10.9 pp., in 2014 it reached 12.4 % for the age-group of youths between 15-24 years of age (Figure 2).

The same trend was shown also in the development of the NEET rate on genders. The NEET rate among young women was higher than among men, irrespective of the age group considered, as opposed to the European Union where, for the age group from 15 to 19 years of age, the NEET rate among young men was higher than the one of the young women for the entire period taken into account.

Figure 2 NEET rate development, on age-groups in EU and Romania, in the period 2007-2014, (%)



Source: Eurostat statistics (online data code: [yth\_empl\_160])

### 3. Economic and social consequences of youths entering into the NEET category

Each of the youths entering into the NEET category brings along a certain cost and, as result, this does not represent an issue only for the concerned individual but also for the society and economy as a whole. Calculating these costs plays an important role in developing policies for youths and in adopting measures for increasing their insertion on the labour market and encouraging them to remain within the educational or vocational training systems.

#### ✚ Economic costs

The computation methodology of these costs is complex. Many of these previous studies were realised in the Great Britain (Coles and collaborators, 2010). Recent estimates of the economic costs of the NEET youths at European level were realised by Eurofound, Mascherini and Mattei (2011), Giovanni S.F.B., Marelli E. and Signorelli M. (2013), Elder S. (2015), studies realised by OECD, ILO, Eurostat, etc.

Due to the fact that the series of possible costs for the NEET segment (formed from actual costs and costs on medium- and long-term) is on one hand very wide and varied and, on the other hand, the necessary data for measuring these costs can be insufficient, or might be lacking, it results that estimating the economic costs

generated by youths within the NEET category can be very complex.

Godfrey and others (2002) have developed a methodology for estimating the costs generated by NEET youths by identifying their impact on:

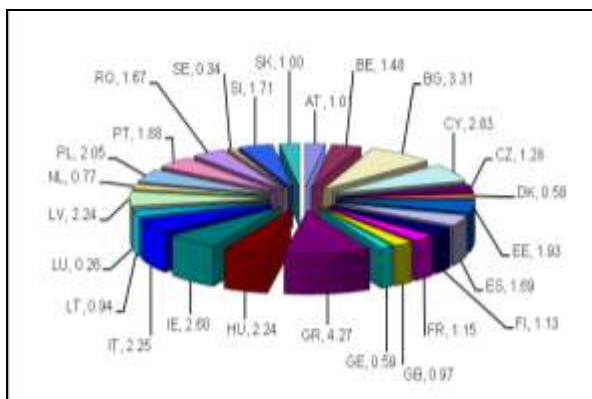
- *Costs covered from public finances* by which is attempted to identify the impact that the NEET category has on the public finances and takes into account the social assistance systems (such as unemployment benefits, child-care allowances, housing allowances, study allowances, etc.), as well as expenditures related to health, social assistance and penal justice matters;
- *Costs in terms of resources* that aim at the so-called "total costs in terms of resources". These include estimates of the losses caused to the economy, general losses of social assistance services granted to the individual in question and to his/her family, as well as the impact of costs in terms of resources, or of the opportunity costs on the rest of the society (the income of employees and of the individuals developing independent activities, services for employees other than financial ones, goods produced for own consumption; private pensions, etc.).

In the Eurofound Report, *Mapping youth transitions in Europe din 2014*, are presented the outcomes of the estimates with respect to economic losses for the member-states which derive from their incapacity to integrate the NEET youths' group in the labour market. The yearly total of 162.809 billion euro (on increase against the preceding years: 119 billion euro in the year 2008, and 153 billion euro in the year 2011) (Eurofound, 2012), which corresponds to a percentage of 1.26% from the aggregated GDP, consists from 151.393 billion euro lost gains and 14.415 billion euro transfer surplus. At country level, the highest annual expenditures, expressed in euro, are paid by: Italy (34.9 bill. euro); France (21.3 bill. Euro); Great Britain (17 bill. Euro); Spain (15.9 bill. Euro); and Germany (13.4 bill. Euro).

With respect to the GDP percentage allotted to the NEET category, Greece and Bulgaria pay the most (4.27%, respectively 3.31%). The cost generated by the NEET category as GDP percentage is rather low in Luxemburg (0.26%), and Germany (0.34%) (Figure3).

In Romania, the total cost generated by the NEET youths in terms of resources was of 2.135 bill. Euro, and the one covered by the public finances of 0.063 bill. Euro representing 1.67% from GDP on increase by 7 pp against the year 2011 (Figure 3).

Figure 3 Annual cost generated by the NEET category as % from GDP in the year 2012



Data source: Eurofound (2014), Mapping youth transitions in Europe, Publications Office of the European Union

#### ✚ The social consequences of the NEET status

The economic costs generated by the NEET youths represents but part from the price that the member-states are paying for youths from this social category. The negative consequences of the NEET status are numerous and affect not only the individual and his family, but also the society as a whole. The exclusion of youths, both on the labour market and in the education or vocational training systems, increases the risk of individual's social exclusion and diminishes the opportunity of re-employment.

The low level or even the lack of an income among NEET youths does not allow for their involvement in various activities and for purchasing various consumption goods. The NEET youths are individuals who, by their status are excluded from the social relationships/networks created on the job or in the educational environment.

The lack of a job or failure in enrolling within an educational or vocational training system affects severely any young individual both from material and emotional viewpoint. The direct effects of the NEET status are extremely visible and have a crucial impact regarding all facets in the life of a human being, from social to private, from family to friends.

The characteristics of a NEET youth are feelings of stress, panic, anxiety, and thus frustration, anger and marked anxiety emerge. All these emotional states that the youth is undergoing because of low income or lack thereof have consequences both on the respective individual and on his relationship with the surrounding world. Interpersonal relationships are threatened by the behaviour of the NEET individual who might find refuge in numerous damaging activities.

Also, it could be considered that one of the reasons for youths' migration is found in the value of the NEET

rate. The youths are giving up family, friends, birthplace, the environment in which they grew up and where they once had certain stability in searching for a better paid job abroad. Thus, if the family is already established, it unravels and children are left alone at a tender age; otherwise, the youth are postponing the moment of grounding a family with severe demographic effects. As result, we find that the NEET rate has a significant effect within a family, the status of NEET affecting the cohesion and harmony of a family.

A specific role plays the moral and psychical state that affects the youth turned NEET more than the economic aspect. A complex of uselessness with respect to society and family is developed and displayed. At the same time, an extended NEET period of time which generates the poverty of an important group of the young population can trigger deep social conflicts.

The monetary and non-monetary barriers that NEET youths are facing daily make them more susceptible against traumatic experiences, and these, in their turn, can change and become sublimated in a general resentful discontent against the entire society and government either national or regional/local, or against the one perceived as "invasive" of regional or international superstructures (for instance, European Union, IMF, the World Bank, etc.).

In this respect, the political decision factors have expressed their concerns regarding the possible consequences and implications of the NEET status on the democratic commitment and civic participation. To these is added the danger that some NEET youths decide to disconnect from the civil society, as it is known that the active participation of youths, implicitly of the NEET one to the democratic processes of the society is an important element of the society's sustainability. Yet, the opposite is the decision of active, anarchic, destructive involvement and, sometimes, with options for movements of the militarised or terrorist type, that seem to provide answers where, in their perception, society and family have failed in supporting them.

Even if in the specialised literature is shown that with respect to the confidence in the State's institution the feelings of youths are similar to the ones of other age categories (Nazzari, 2008), still it is possible that NEET individuals lose their confidence in institutions because they can have the impression that authorities are not able to solve their issues. For this reason, the mistrust of a high weight of youths who are not included in the labour force market, or enrolled in education or vocational training systems can contribute to undermining the legitimacy of political leaders, political parties and institutions within the society.

Recent data show that in several advanced democracies the participation level of the youths with voting rights in general and of those from the NEET category in particular is on a continuous decreasing trend (Norris, 2002; Phelps, 2005). NEET individuals are less interested in politics than the youths who are employed on the labour market or enrolled into an educational or vocational training system, the percentage of NEET youths belonging to a political party being considerably lower than the one of the other categories of youths (Hooghe, 2004; Blais, 2002).

The similarities between the NEET groups from various EU-28 countries with respect to participation to, and interest in the political and social activity from within the society allowed for their classification in three large clusters (Salvatore L., 2013).

- The Scandinavian country group where there are no significant differences between the NEET youths and those employed in the labour force market or who are enrolled into the educational or vocational training system with respect to their democratic and social commitment; this group could be called the “loyalist” group that is actively involved in the life of the ‘polis’ and who often outlines a roadmap for the future even in the absence of their ‘real’ existence in the active life, according to statistics;
- The group of Central and Eastern European countries where the democratic and social commitment of the NEET youths is less than the one of those employed on the labour market or enrolled in education or vocational training; this is the group of those who can be regarded as the group of ‘polis’ non-involved youths, yet with surprising moments of involvement in movements which apparently have nothing to do with politics, or with economy, but relatively connected to the interests of the society, respectively the environmental protection issues, and those regarding the protection of natural resources;
- The group of Southern Europe countries: Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece where the NEET group apparently is more active in the political and social life despite failing to identify themselves with the main actors of the political scene in these countries; this group can be regarded as the group of “involved contestants” in the life of the society.

As result of their status, the NEET youths would have more time for social and political participation, for involvement in voluntary activities at the community level, all actions that probably in time could make them more “visible” according to their knowledge, talents,

skills, aptitudes and capacities to some potential future employers. I would rather say: the NEET status, if we consider the above clusters, provides a contradictory image when we take into account their action in the society and in the economic life, resulting an image which is rather close to the so-called “power-distance index” (Hofstede, 2009) by which nations are defined on six cultural dimensions depending on the way they accept, among others, inequality/inequities, as well as on the approaches with respect to gender differences.

### Conclusions

At global level, even if the economies succeeded to a certain extent, to recover the growth levels foregoing the crisis period, still the creation of new jobs is not yet sufficient for lessening the pressures on the labour force market. This state of affairs is due to the increased complexity of the economic environment which underwent in-depth changes, also during the period of the crisis, the options of several enterprises and companies being oriented towards realising savings and diminishing the costs in particular by implementing automation on a large scale by implicitly cutting off jobs, and especially, by providing fewer opportunities related to the creation of new jobs (Frey, C. B., Osborne, M. A., 2013).

Youths were the most affected by the recent economic-financial crisis, their employment perspectives diminishing, and the unemployment rate reached alarming high shares. In 2014, at world level, the unemployment rate among youths was of 13.2 %, thus being three times higher than the unemployment rate among adults. From the outbreak of the crisis, almost all EU member-states have registered a considerable increase of the unemployment rate among youths, which in the year 2013 at European level reached the value of 23.7% (and of 22.2% in the year 2014). In some member-states, such as Greece and Spain, the unemployment rate among youths increased to over 50%. The only notable exceptions from this general trend are Austria and Germany, countries where there is a strong dual education system.

In 2014, the percentage of youths who were not gainfully employed or pursuing an educational or vocational training form in the EU-28 varied from 6.4% for the age group between 15-19 years, to 20.3% for the youth in the age group between 25-29 years. This percentage varies significantly from one member-state to the other, on each age group. As in the case of the unemployment rate among youths, one of the effects of the economic-financial crisis is also the increase of the NEET rate among youths with higher education.

The female-male gap of the NEET rate increased considerably in a series of member-states, reaching 10.4 percentage points in the Czech Republic, and

values over 6 pp in Hungary (8.6 pp), Romania (7 pp), Slovakia (6.8 pp) and Malta (6 pp). Still, from the available data, it is difficult to establish the probable reasons for this outcome. The wide difference between the NEET rates on genders can be determined by the socio-economic and traditional conditions of some countries.

The more the entry into this social category takes place at earlier young ages, the more it can have severe consequences on long term. The “scarring effects” of this status can have negative effects on the physical and mental health. Also, they may lead to drug abuse, involvement in criminal activities, to disengagement from life and society. As result of this status for a longer period, large gaps can emerge in the social conditions: isolation, employment in uncertain circumstances and for low wages, criminality, and physical and mental health issues, failure to set up a family or divorce, etc.

Each of these consequences triggers certain costs and, as result, the NEET status does not represent an issue only for the concerned individual, but also for the society and the economy as a whole.

The calculation of these costs plays an important role both for developing policies for youths and for adopting measures of increasing their insertion on the labour market and for encouraging them to remain involved with the educational or vocational training systems, and for estimating the losses born by the national economies when a large part of the young population is in the NEET situation.

The loss of a generation does not have only economic, but also social consequences. The issues faced by the NEET youths daily make them susceptible in accumulating traumatic experiences that can turn into general and resentful discontent against the entire society and against the national and regional governments, and also against European or international superstructures perceived sometimes as “invasive”.

The size of the NEET population in Europe, the economic and social consequences generated by the NEET status draws the attention of the decision factors to the necessity of new political actions for supporting the reintegration of the youth on the labour force market, or in the educational and vocational training systems. Thus, there is the risk of sacrificing several generations of youths who are in their educational period, or even on the threshold of entering on the labour market, which might contribute to accumulating even more social risks to which is added, if we take into account the demographic factor, also a swift demographic ageing with increasingly smaller cohorts entering the active life at European level, and hence a more increased pressure from the economic and social perspective.

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